

do so. They were able to show the need in their respective districts.

This bill, it seems to me, in light of the strong support it has had in our subcommittee and our committee, from Members from all parts of the country, and of all backgrounds and parties, in light of that fact, I urge passage of the bill, and I urge all Members to support this bipartisan bill for economic development for the underdeveloped regions of our country.

Mr. McHUGH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 3246, Regional Economic and Infrastructure Development Act of 2007. I appreciate the work Chairman OBERSTAR and Representatives GRAVES, HODES, and MICHAUD have done to develop this important legislation and bring it to the House floor.

The Regional Economic and Infrastructure Development Act is designed to alleviate systemic poverty and underdevelopment in our Nation's most severely economically distressed areas. These include rural Alaska, Appalachia, the Mississippi Delta region, the northern Great Plains region, the southeast crescent region, the southwest border region, and the northern border region, which includes all 11 counties that I have the honor to represent: Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Fulton, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lewis, Madison, Oneida, Oswego, and St. Lawrence.

To provide a comprehensive, consistent and broad-based approach to economic and infrastructure development, H.R. 3246 authorizes five regional economic development commissions. These commissions, modeled after the successful Appalachian Regional Commission, would have a uniform set of procedures and a common structure for administration, decision-making, management, and planning.

With funding authorized and provided by Congress, each Commission would make grants to States and local governments, Indian tribes, and public or nonprofit organizations for projects to develop transportation, public, and telecommunications infrastructure. These projects would also further efforts to provide job skills training, improve basic health care and related services, promote resource conservation, and development of both renewable and alternative energy sources.

My constituent counties, like many others within the northern border region, lag behind the rest of the Nation in economic growth and continue to experience higher than average levels of unemployment, poverty, and outmigration. Very simply, my constituents, as well as those who live in the other affected areas, should no longer be left behind. Moreover, I am confident that with the assistance provided through H.R. 3246, the economies of all the impacted counties will improve, thus resulting in an enhanced quality of life for all.

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 3246, the Regional Economic and Infrastructure Development Act of 2007, which will help spur economic development in my district of El Paso, TX. I would like to thank Chairman OBERSTAR for his vision regarding the need and importance of regional authorities for development in areas of the country with huge economic need. For the past three Congresses, I have introduced my bill, the Southwest Regional Border Authority Act, in an attempt to bring some relief to the United States-Mexico border and my district of El Paso, TX. This year, under the leadership

of Chairman OBERSTAR, my bill has been included into his overall legislation. I would also like to thank many of my colleagues who represent districts along the United States-Mexico border for their support in the creation of the Southwest Regional Border Authority.

The Chairman's bill would authorize \$1.25 billion over the period of FY 2008 through FY 2012 for five regional commissions one of which will be created in the United States-Mexico border region. The Authorities would be Federal-State partnerships for providing assistance to economically distressed and underdeveloped areas that have experienced high levels of unemployment, poverty, or outmigration. Three of the commissions would be new and would assist areas in the southeastern United States and areas along the Mexican and Canadian borders; two of the commissions would replace existing Authorities in the Delta and northern Great Plains regions. The bill would establish uniform administrative structures and responsibilities for the commissions, and authorize the commissions to provide financial assistance for projects and programs in their respective regions to develop transportation and infrastructure, provide job skills training and support business development.

The Southwest border region, as defined in the bill, includes all counties within 150 miles of the United States-Mexico border. This region contains 11 counties in New Mexico, 65 counties in Texas, 10 counties in Arizona, and 7 counties in California, with a combined population of approximately 29 million.

According to research compiled by the Interagency Task Force on the Economic Development of the Southwest Border, 20 percent of the residents in my region live below the poverty level, unemployment rates often reach as high as five times the national average, and a lack of adequate access to capital has created economic disparities, making it difficult for businesses to start up in the region. Border communities have long endured a depressed economy and low-paying jobs. Our economic challenges partly stem from our position as a border community.

Economic development in border communities is difficult to stimulate without assistance from the government, private sector, and community organizations. H.R. 3246 would help foster planning to encourage infrastructure improvements, technology deployment, education and workforce training, and community development through entrepreneurship.

Modeled in part after the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Southwest Border Regional Authority and other Authorities would follow four guiding principles:

First, the Authorities would fund proposals designed at the local level followed by approval at the State level in order to meet regional economic development goals;

Second, projects leading to the creation of a diversified regional economy would be prioritized. Currently, States and counties often are forced to compete against each other for limited funding;

Third, the Authorities would be independent agencies. This would prevent them from having to attempt to satisfy another Federal agency's mission requirements when determining which projects to fund; and

Finally, the Authorities would be comprised of one Senate-confirmed Federal representative and the governors of the States of jurisdiction.

For too long, many areas of our country including the Southwest border region have been ignored, overlooked, and underfunded. We need to recognize the challenges facing these underserved areas and help them make the most of their many assets. I believe the Authorities created in the Regional Economic and Infrastructure Development Act of 2007 would go a long way toward achieving the goal of economic prosperity in some of the poorest regions of our country.

Again, I would like to thank Chairman OBERSTAR for his leadership on this issue and look forward to the implementation of this important legislation.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 3246, a bill to provide a comprehensive regional approach to economic and infrastructure development in the most severely economically distressed regions in the Nation.

H.R. 3246, the Regional Economic and Infrastructure Development Act of 2007, reauthorizes two existing commissions, the Delta Regional Commission and the Northern Great Plains Regional Commission, and establishes three new regional economic development commissions: the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission, the Southwest Border Regional Commission, and the Northern Border Regional Commission. These Commissions will address problems of systemic poverty and underdevelopment in their respective regions.

This legislation authorizes all of these regional commissions under a common framework of administration and management, modeled after the procedures for the highly successful Appalachian Regional Commission. By providing a uniform set of procedures, this bill provides a consistent method for distributing economic development funds and ensures a comprehensive regional approach to economic and infrastructure development in the most severely distressed regions in the country.

H.R. 3246 authorizes \$250 million per year for fiscal years 2008 through 2012 for each commission to provide vital assistance for the development of our Nation's most chronically poor and distressed regions.

Each of the three new commissions authorized by this bill serves a unique need. The Southwest border region includes all counties within 150 miles of the United States-Mexico border. This region contains 11 counties in New Mexico, 65 counties in Texas, 10 counties in Arizona, and 7 counties in California for a combined population of approximately 29 million people. According to research compiled by the Interagency Task Force on the Economic Development of the Southwest Border, 20 percent of the residents in this region of the Nation live below the poverty level, and unemployment rates often reach as high as five times the national unemployment rate. A lack of adequate access to capital has created economic disparities and made it difficult for businesses to start up in the region.

The northern border region stretches from Maine to New York. While the region enjoys abundant natural resources and is rich in potential, it lags behind much of the Nation in economic growth, and its people have not shared equitably in the Nation's prosperity. The region's historic reliance on a few basic industries and agriculture has failed to provide a diverse enough economic base for vigorous, self-sustaining growth. In the countries in this region, 12.5 percent of the population lives in